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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000178

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SUBJECT: RULING PARTY OFFICIAL OFFERS INSIGHTS

Classified By: CDA Joseph Pennington, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Republican Party official Samvel Nikoyan offered confidential, personal insights on the political standoff. He reported that President Kocharian and President-elect/PM Sargsian have very different strategies, with Kocharian favoring a "get tough" approach, and Sargsian preferring to negotiate with and/or outwait the opposition. Nikoyan said that Artur Baghdassarian's party had done a much more thorough job in documenting Election Day violations, and thus the ruling party hoped to entice Baghdassarian into a coalition agreement to keep this evidence out of the Constitutional Court. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) CLOSE, BUT NOT INNER CIRCLE: Samvel Nikoyan has been a useful embassy interlocutor from time to time, as a relative progressive member of the ruling party. He has, on the margins, helped smooth the ways for such democracy implementers as IFES and the National Democratic Institute, seemingly due to his own belief that this assistance has value for Armenia. Nikoyan has no government position, but is a member of the Republican Party's top executive council. Though relatively young, Nikoyan is part of the camp within the Republican Party that was close to the late Prime Minister and founding party member Andranik Margarian -- a wing that has not entirely found peace with the influx of influential political players that joined the party in 2006 when Serzh Sargsian joined. Nikoyan called our LES Political Specialist February 27 for a lengthy, informal chat, seemingly based on their long-standing friendly relationship, rather than specifically intending to communicate to the U.S. Embassy.

13. (C) DIVERGENCE ON STRATEGY: Nikoyan said there was an ongoing disagreement between Prime Minister Sargsian and President Kocharian on how to deal with the protracted rallies in Freedom Square. While the president prefers to drive the protesters from the square, the PM is sensitive to the negative reaction that would cause, and prefers if possible to reach a peaceful solution. He favors a combination of negotiation with the more reasonable opposition elements, and simply waiting until the demonstrators grow tired of the demonstrations. (NOTE: FM Oskanian's briefing to the diplomatic corps February 29 (septel) could suggest that the PM has won this argument for now. END NOTE) Nikoyan said that while the LTP rallies might seem entirely peaceful on the surface, he alleged that LTP was secretly forming armed units as well.

14. (C) LTP RAILED, BUT BAGHDASSARIAN GOT THE GOODS: Nikoyan said the ruling party was most interested in attracting Orinats Yerkir party leader Artur Baghdassarian into a power-sharing coalition. Partly, this is because he is less radicalized and absolutist than Levon Ter-Petrossian, but also because, he said, Orinats Yerkir had done a much better job of training its commission members and accredited party

proxies. The party's PEC members and proxies had done a much more systematic job of collecting certified copies of the final results protocols and other relevant documents on Election Night, and thus had a much stronger package of documentary evidence that it could submit to the Constitutional Court. If Baghdassarian did not get a deal he found satisfactory, he would most likely join LTP's court complaint seeking to annul the election. (NOTE: Baghdassarian announced February 29 that his party had concluded a cooperation agreement with the ruling Republican and Prosperous Armenia coalition. Baghdassarian has been offered the position of Secretary of the National Security Council -- which seems surprisingly insignificant, since that position has been only a part-time job in recent memory. The current incumbent of the position is presidential chief of staff Armen Gevorgian, and his predecessor was then-Defense Minister Serzh Sargsian. END NOTE)

15. (C) CONSTITUTIONAL COURT A HELPFUL DELAY: Nikoyan thought that the ten-day window for the Constitutional Court to act on election related complaints would be useful in that the delay would give protesters that much more time to get bored of their demonstrations.

16. (C) RAFFI TAKES INSTRUCTIONS FROM U.S.?: Nikoyan shared his (completely mistaken) belief that Heritage Party leader and former AmCit Raffi Hovhannissian takes political instructions from the U.S. Government. Nikoyan therefore found it very worrisome that Hovhannissian had aligned himself with LTP.

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